

Both France and Morocco have strong regimes and both have declared that they want the whole truth revealed about the disappearance - and probable murder - of Mehdi Ben Barka. De Gaulle himself has stated that it is a question of French honour: the vanished Moroccan leader was a guest of the Republic who was kidnapped in Paris itself. Morocco's honour is equally at stake, since King Hassan considers it intolerable that his country has been slandered and one of his chief ministers, General Oufkir, unjustly accused. It was therefore reasonable to assume, in view of the determination expressed by these two autocratic governments, that the trial of Ben Barka's alleged abductors would eventually throw light on the guilty, no matter how highly placed they may be. In De Gaulle's case there was, one might think, an additional reason for getting to the bottom of the affair. The circumstances surrounding the kidnapping recalled some of the worst public scandals of the Fourth Republic - the kind of thing which the majestic probity of the Gaullist regime was supposed to have banished for ever.

Six weeks ago the trial at last began: it turned out to be a macabre pantomime. In the dock were six accused who could have had no motive for committing the crime (five of them did not even know Ben Barka), but who faced the risk of heavy prison sentences rather than try to exonerate themselves by revealing the names of those who had hired them. With the exception of Philippe Bernier, who pleaded not guilty, all the others admitted that in different degrees they were mixed up in the sinister affair, but none would explain how or why. Rarely have such accused been seen in the Paris criminal court.

The witnesses were no more forthcoming than the accused. The high police officials invoked 'professional secrecy' in withholding the names of their informants, and 'government security' in explaining the reasons for their rather tardy and ineffective intervention. The diplomats would say nothing about the Franco-Moroccan transactions following Ben Barka's disappearance, because of 'diplomatic secrecy'. Several journalists called to give evidence also chose not to reveal their sources of information in the name of 'professional secrecy'. Even a tradesman, summoned to testify on a point of detail, declared that he would say nothing since 'personal secrecy' was involved. Judge Perez, who presided, raised his hands heavenwards and exclaimed: 'I am disgusted we shall never know the truth.' Coming

from a judge, this declaration of despair could also be regarded as somewhat unusual.

The verdict was to have been delivered last Wednesday, and on the following day the court was due to try *in absentia* the two accused Moroccans, General Oufkir and Ahmed Dlimi, director of Morocco's Special Branch. But at the very last moment came a *coup de théâtre*: Ahmed Dlimi, after writing a moving letter to his King, decided to give himself up to clear his country of 'unjustified charges'. He shaved off his moustache and travelled to Paris under a false name. King Hassan, deeply touched,

immediately rewarded his courageous servant by promoting him to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, accorded Dlimi's father an audience to show his gratitude and instructed his Minister of Information to defend him before the French bench. This time the moment of truth seemed to be drawing near, for Dlimi is no supernumerary: it is established that he was at the scene of the crime on 30 October 1965, and it is believed that he knows everything about Ben Barka's fate. For 24 hours all Paris held its breath: what would Dlimi say?

Well, he will say nothing - at least for some time to come. For after all his heroic gestures Dlimi has decided to fight a procedural battle rather than talk. He has applied to the appeal court because the warrant for his arrest was not served at his domicile and because the Franco-Moroccan convention lays down that 'both parties undertake to prosecute their own nationals, even for offences committed on the territory of the other state'. It is hardly likely that the French criminal court has much confidence in the way Moroccan justice might deal with a subject so highly regarded by his King; so sooner or later Dlimi will appear before the Paris court. But it is generally believed that his trial will not take place in the near future and that a lot of water will run under the Seine bridges before a new bid is made to uncover the truth of the Ben Barka affair.

However, despite the delays, it would be wrong to think that the six-week trial of the minor characters has been pointless. Ploughing through the discreet and confused evidence of the secret agents and police officers, one nevertheless finds certain clues as to what happened before and during the kidnapping of Ben Barka. Thus in May 1965 the French counter-espionage service knew that the Moroccans were preparing to 'get hold of Ben Barka by unorthodox means'. The aim of this operation, it appears, was not very clear to the James Bonds of SDECE (Service de Documentation et de Contre-espionage), for they believed that Oufkir and Dlimi wanted to entice the opposition leader to Rabat in order to effect a reconciliation with him. A very shaky theory, as relations between the royal palace and Ben Barka's friends in Morocco had sharply deteriorated since May 1965 and reconciliation was more unlikely than ever. But let us admit that SDECE was badly informed and that its inaction is explained by its ignorance of Moroccan politics.

The other French police forces (for there are several) were no more vigilant in protecting Ben Barka because their officials

the Moroccans had a 'correspondent' inside the Ministry of the Interior who gave the 'right' for the two policemen, Suchon and Veitot, to question Ben Barka and take him to a villa near Paris belonging to Bouchesciehe, a gangster well known in Casablanca. Up to this point the account of the kidnapping seems quite clear. Things only begin to grow obscure after the handing over of Ben Barka by the police to a group of gangsters (or 'vagrants' as they are politely called), who presumably were to take him to Morocco. Ben Barka was no drawing-room politician: he was tough, unyielding, a man who had lived underground for years. He was probably armed and, one can imagine, seeing the trio of 'vagrants', had no illusions about the danger he faced.

So something unforeseen must have happened in Bouchesciehe's villa with the result that the gangsters began to call Rabat frantically for fresh instructions. Oufkir and Dlimi arrived personally the following day, and instead of going to an hotel, if only for the sake of appearances, they went to the villa - to decide how to get rid of Ben Barka's body? How does it happen that no police followed the Moroccan Interior Minister when he arrived in Paris and went immediately to a council of war with the 'vagrants'? How is it possible that meetings of this kind can take place with impunity on territory where, as *Le Monde* commented ironically, 'in theory French sovereignty obtains'? And, finally, how is it possible for Ben Barka's body to vanish without trace when all the various police forces had been alerted to the kidnapping of the Moroccan opposition leader?

We have no accurate answers to these riddles, but on one point we can be certain: such extraordinary 'irregularities' could not have occurred unless important men, and not just ordinary subordinates, had been involved in the affair. But autocratic regimes do not like to admit that 'important servants of the state' can, through incompetence or corruption, get mixed up in such disturbing criminal enterprises. Paris and Rabat were unable to reach agreement either on the suppression of this painful case or on an explanation that would be plausible while not too damaging to one or the other. Justice has been paralysed by this lack of co-operation on the part of the men in power, which led first to the tragi-comic nature of the trial and then to its adjournment.

Is Judge Perez right when he declares that we will never know the truth? Many Frenchmen believe that he is, that the Ben Barka case is like a detective novel without the last chapter - the chapter which solves the crime and reveals the identity of the guilty. But this sense of despair is accompanied by bitter indignation that a regime which regards 'national prestige' as the alpha and omega of its policy can hush up an affair so prejudicial to France's good name. As for King Hassan, whatever he says or does, he will never be able to wipe out the stain of this dreadful business from his country's reputation: even if his Minister of the Interior, General Oufkir, did not personally commit the crime, in the eyes of the world he inspired it, and Ben Barka's blood is on his hands. No procedural manoeuvres will prevent people from believing that there is something rotten in the kingdom of Morocco.

Paris

NEXT WEEK

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October 29, 1966

Approved For Release 2001/07/26 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000100350010-5

MOROCCAN OFFICIAL MAKES SECOND
APPEAL TO FRENCH COURT

Ben Barka Kidnap Trial Delay

CPYRGHT

BEIRUT — Lieutenant-Colonel Ahmed Dlimi, deputy head of the Moroccan security police, who caused a sensation last week in the Ben Barka case by surrendering to French police has made a second appeal to the French Supreme Court to rule that he cannot be tried in France; it was learned in Paris on October 25, according to reports published here.

The official's surrender on October 19 came in the sixth week of the Paris trial of 13 men (seven of them in absentia) who are alleged to have been involved in the disappearance of Mehdi Ben Barka, the Moroccan opposition leader, from a Paris street on October 29 last year. Colonel Dlimi had been one of the accused being tried in absentia, along with Brigadier-General Mohammed Oufkir, Morocco's Minister of the Interior.

Trial proceedings were suspended and a new trial ordered because of complicated French judicial proceedings. It may not begin for many months.

Colonel Dlimi and General Oufkir had both claimed earlier in the proceedings that they could not be judged in France, under the terms of a Franco-Moroccan judicial agreement.

Lawyers representing Colonel Dlimi said in Paris on October 25 that a second appeal had been made on his behalf because it was feared the first might be rejected on the grounds that it was made before he was taken into custody. Since his surrender in Paris the Moroccan official has been kept in custody in prison. According to French judicial sources his lawyers have questioned the legality of his detention under the terms of the Franco-Moroccan judicial agreement.

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CPYRGHT

SEMINAR ATTACKS IMPERIALISM

CAIRO — An Egyptian editor has expressed the hope that the Soviet-Chinese dispute will be settled and will not be allowed to imperil African unity. Mr. Lotfi Al-Kholi, editor of the Cairo monthly magazine Al-Talia (Vanguard) was addressing the opening session on October 24 of a seminar on "Africa, National and Social Revolution", organised by his magazine and the "Problems of Peace and Socialism" magazine of Prague.

The seminar is being attended by 31 political parties and organisations from 30 African countries, who will be meeting here until October 29.

Mr. Kholi said that the phenomena facing Africa today was how to seek a new strategy and tactics in order to carry out national liberation and social revolution at the same time. This could not be achieved through following slogans and generalities or freezing revolutionary theory in rigid ideological forms, he added.

The speaker hailed the "glorious resistance" of the Vietnamese people and called for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops, followed by self-determination.

He said imperialists were supporting armed racists in South Africa, Rhodesia and Israel in their "conspiracies to sabotage African revolutionaries gains."

Mr. Youssef Sebai, secretary-general of the U.A.R. committee for Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity, called on the developing countries to stand firmly together in order to impose the best conditions regarding economic and trade exchanges on developed countries.

The following day Mr. Kholi presented a 47-page research paper entitled "Approved For Release 2001/07/26 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000100350010-5"

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